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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

MEMORIAL

OF

THE NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

TO THE

HONOURABLE THE LEGISLATURE

OF THE

STATE OF NEW-YORK.

NEW-YORK

PRINTED BY C. S. VAN WINKLE,

NO. 122 WATER-STREET.

1814.

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To the Honourable the Legislature of the State of New-York, the Memorial of the New-York Historical Society,

MOST RESPECTFULLY REPRESENTS,

THAT this institution was established for the purpose of acquiring and promoting a knowledge of the natural, civil, literary, and ecclesiastical history of America, and more particularly of this state. The attainment of objects so various, comprehensive, and important, requiring such extensiveness of information, such profundity of research, such exertion of industry, and such liberality of expense, is unquestionably beyond the means and the faculties of any individual, however he may be endowed with the gifts of fortune and genius, and whatever may be the extent of his enterprize, activity, and influence. Associations, comprehending a mass of information and talent, and embracing not only the disposition, but the ability,

to promote knowledge, are essentially necessary to crown with success any important undertaking of this nature. With these motives, and for these objects, this society was formed. A liberal and enlightened legislature, justly appreciating its importance, granted it a charter of incorporation, and it now only remains for them to complete the important work which has received their approving voice, by an extension to this society of a portion of that munificence which, we are proud to say, characterizes the legislature of this state.

During the short period of the existence of this society, we have devoted no inconsiderable portion of time, attention, and money, to collect books, pamphlets, manuscripts, maps, medals, and other materials which may tend to illustrate and complete the great outlines of our history. This collection, on account of the number, the variety, and the rarity of its objects, may be safely valued at ten thousand dollars. If in the infant state of the society, without public patronage, and without any other excitement than a desire to be useful, as humble contributors to the great stock of human knowledge, we have been able to accomplish so much, what might we not effect if public bounty should be united with individual contribution, and if the

countenance of the legislature should stamp a value upon our researches, and enable us to dispel the clouds which envelop the history of our country.

It is well known to your honourable body, that America has been settled principally by the English, the Dutch, the French, the Spaniards, and the Portuguese. The Swedes at one period planted a colony on the Delaware. The Danes, also, have occupied islands in the West Indies; and several islands between Asia and America derive their population from Russia and its dependencies. How important, and how necessary is it to procure the books which have been written in those countries illustrative of the affairs of America. It is well known, that many manuscripts are buried in the archives of state, or in the libraries of public bodies, which might be transcribed, and which would shed new light on our history. The Bibliotheca Americana, published in England, imperfect as it is, indicates what invaluable and unexplored treasures for our historians may be obtained in that country.

But we would beg leave to solicit the attention of the legislature more particularly to the history of this state. It is unnecessary to descant upon the

imperfections of its natural history. Whole departments of this science have been almost entirely neglected; the powers of observation and investigation have not been applied to elucidate and explore them; the destructive hand of time is rapidly sweeping into oblivion many important objects of inquiry; and what might now with facility be rescued from oblivion, the flight of a few years will place beyond the reach of human power.

The civil history of this state may be divided into four parts:

1. When occupied by the aborigines.
2. When under the government of the Dutch, which was about half a century.
3. Its state under England, which continued about one hundred and twelve years, and which includes the proprietary government of the Duke of York, and its government under the kings of Great Britain, excepting about sixteen months, when it was repossessed by the Dutch.
4. And lastly, its political existence as a member of an independent government.

Before the lapse of many years, the remnant of the Indian nations which now inhabit the state, will experience the fate of all sublunary things. The

few antiquities of the country; the forts and the tumuli, which may now be easily explored, will be effaced by the extension of cultivation. The natural history of the man of America, disfigured and perverted as he has been by European intercourse, may still be obtained to a considerable extent; his language may be put on record, and his traditions may be perpetuated.

As before the revolution the colonies of France and Great Britain were connected by vicinity, by treaty, by trade, and by continual and habitual intercourse with the Five Nations, and other Indians which occupied this state, we can obtain valuable materials to illustrate this important period, from the libraries and public collections of those countries: many learned, elaborate, and interesting works have never been seen in America; some are so scarce that they cannot be procured without the expense of transcribing; and papers of great moment have never been printed.

The regular minutes of the transactions of the Indian commissioners for this colony, from 1675 to 1751, as kept by a secretary employed for the purpose, were bound up in four large folio volumes. This invaluable collection, and the subsequent colonial records relative to Indian affairs,

are not now to be found in this state; and they were probably conveyed away by Sir John Johnson or his agents, at the commencement of the revolution. The loss of these documents would produce a chasm in our history that could not be supplied; and we hope that they may still be retrieved. Our concerns and negotiations with the Indians, since our existence as a state, have not been preserved in regular and complete order. They are scattered among the bureaus of our chief magistrates, or are buried in the voluminous files of the legislature.

To obtain materials for the Dutch portion of our history, comprizing an interesting period of half a century, we must have recourse to the papers of the Dutch West India Company, and to the archives of the then government of that nation; to the Dutch records of some of our counties, and in the office of the secretary of state; to the public offices in the neighbouring colonies with whose governments the Dutch had negotiations; and to several books published in the Dutch and Latin languages, relative to this country, and which are scarcely known to us. The darkness which hangs over this branch, may be perceived in the history of New-York, written by William

Smith, a work which skims lightly over this interesting period, leaving it almost entirely unnoticed.

To supply that part of our history when we were subject to Great Britain, the most valuable materials may be obtained from various sources. From Chalmer's Political Annals it appears, that there are many manuscripts in the Plantation Office, entitled, New-York Entries, and New-York Papers. We find, in the catalogue of manuscripts preserved in the British Museum, some writings that refer particularly to this state; and in the catalogue of books belonging to that institution, are preserved many works concerning America, in the Dutch, English, French, Spanish, and Latin Languages, affording a fund of information important and inestimable. We also know that there are many interesting books and manuscripts, relative to this country, in the library of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in America; and perhaps much important information may be obtained from the public offices in Canada.

The history of our country, since the commencement of the revolutionary war, is in a better state of preservation: but even here how many interesting events are passing into oblivion; how many important facts are distorted and misrepre-

sented, how many illustrious achievements are forgotten or neglected. Documents that may illuminate the obscure, explain the doubtful, and embalm the memories of the good and the great, may now be drawn from their dark abodes, where in a few years they will be forgotten or lost. Letters of distinguished individuals, fugitive pamphlets, perishable manuscripts, ought now to be obtained and preserved. The time is precious, and not a moment should be lost.

The only history of this member of the confederacy is that of William Smith, which is brought down to the year 1732. Is it too much to say, that the most important is the worst or least described part of the union?

Anxious as we are to explore these sources of intelligence, and to collect these ample materials, yet we feel that the want of funds presents an obstacle that can only be surmounted by the liberality and public spirit of the legislature. We have done much, and we are willing to do more, in order to preserve the history of the state from oblivion. We are influenced by no other motive than that of elevating the character, and promoting the prosperity of a community, to which we are bound by every tie that is deemed precious and sacred among men:

And let it not be said that the exigencies of the times, and the pressure of a foreign war, render it inexpedient to apply the public bounty to this object. The state is rich in funds, rich in credit, and rich in resources; and she ought to be rich in liberality and public spirit. Genuine greatness never appears in a more resplendent light, or in a more sublime attitude, than in that buoyancy of character which rises superior to danger and difficulty; in that magnanimity of soul which cultivates the arts and sciences amidst the horrors of war, and in that comprehension of mind which cherishes all the cardinal interests of a country, without being distracted or diverted by the most appalling considerations.

We therefore most respectfully solicit the favourable notice of the legislature, and we confidently hope that the result will be auspicious to the interests of literature, and to the honour of our country.

By order and in behalf of the Society,

JOHN PINTARD,

Recording Secretary.

New-York, *January*, 1814.

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